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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 000790

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/21/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ES](#)
SUBJECT: RIVERA INVESTIGATION CONTINUES, BUT SLOWLY
REF: SAN SALVADOR 712

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The investigation into the killing of community activist Marcelo Rivera continues as new claims of death threats and attacks emerge. Archbishop Escobar Alas tells us that he doubts links between mining and Rivera's murder. Ombudsman for Human Rights Oscar Luna said that the investigation has not yet proven a link between Rivera's murder and his political activities, and said the Legislative Assembly's failure to elect a new Attorney General is causing the investigation to proceed slowly. End Summary.

THE INVESTIGATION CONTINUES

¶2. (C) JUDATT met with Acting Attorney General Astor Escalante August 13 regarding the ongoing investigation into the June murder of community activist Marcelo Rivera and the allegations of death threats and attacks against other community members. Escalante assured us that all of the incidents were being vigorously investigated by the specialized organized-crime unit. He said he would keep us apprised of any major developments.

NEW CLAIMS OF ATTACKS AND THREATS

¶3. (C) Media report Father Luis Alberto Quintanilla Rodriguez's claims that three armed, masked men forced his car from a road in Cabanas in an attempt to abduct and murder him on the evening of July 27. He claims that he was able to escape after activating his car alarm. Quintanilla also claimed a prior abduction attempt on July 13, and numerous death threats via cell phone. Media is reporting that Antonio Pacheco, director of the Social and Economic Development Association of Santa Marta in Cabanas has also received death threats by phone.

ARCHBISHOP DOUBTS LINK BETWEEN MINING AND RIVERA MURDER

¶4. (C) Archbishop Jose Luis Escobar Alas told Charge and Poloff August 12 that he is doubtful of a link between the pro-mining interests and the murder of Rivera. He said that at the time of the murder all the major stakeholders and public opinion were firmly anti-mining, thus he does not believe that pro-mining interests would have much to gain by killing an individual activist.

¶5. (C) Escobar Alas said that he doubted Quintanilla's claims of attempted murder. He said that Quintanilla had been suspended from the church several years earlier for his association with a breakaway sect, and, since that time, has often been in conflict with the Catholic Church, and has staged numerous publicity stunts.

PDDH SAYS INVESTIGATION PROCEEDING TOO SLOWLY

¶6. (C) PolOffs met with Human Rights Ombudsman (PDDH), Oscar Luna, on August 20 to discuss the Rivera case. Luna said there is not enough evidence yet to link Rivera,s murder to the government or the Pacific Rim mining company. He said he has urged the police to conduct an exhaustive investigation of the case. He also said that the investigation has proceeded too slowly, which he attributed, in part, to Legislative Assembly,s failure to elect a new Attorney General. Luna also mentioned that the journalists from Cabanas-based Radio Victoria have also received threatening letters, in addition to telephone death threats.

¶7. (C) Comment: At this point, we still cannot rule out a political motive for Rivera's murder, but it seems more likely to be for local political reasons in Cabanas. Nonetheless, this case has taken on a life of its own among some interest groups and many U.S.-based NGOs. In our contact with these NGOs we describe our having raised the case with relevant authorities, emphasizing impartiality and professionalism in the handling of evidence.
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